DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 175 921 TM 009 563

AUTHOR Lott, Winsor A.
TITLE New York's "Truth-in-Testing" Bill: A Cost Benefit Issue.
PUB DATE May 79
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Meeting of the National Consortium on Testing (Arlington, Virginia, May, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Accountability; *College Entrance Examinations; Cost Effectiveness; *Disclosure; Educational Legislation; Educational Testing; Equated Scores; *Estimated Costs; Higher Education; *State Legislation; Test Construction; *Testing Problems; Test Results
IDENTIFIERS *La Valle Bill; New York; New York State Education Department; Test Security; *Truth in Testing Legislation

ABSTRACT

A bill introduced in the New York State Legislature on April 26, 1979, would require that all tests used for postsecondary or professional school admissions become "public records" after they have been administered. The New York State Education Department is opposed to this bill because it would greatly increase the cost of test development and reduce the quality of the tests. In addition, test equating procedures may be adversely affected. As a result, New York State residents would be required to pay higher examination fees and may be faced with abbreviated testing schedules. These consequences are of particular concern because six tests affected by the bill are used by the New York State Education Department as the bases for awarding scholarships and fellowships. The paper concludes that the cost of "open testing" outweighs the benefits. (Author)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED175921

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

NEW YORK'S "TRUTH-IN-TESTING" BILL:

A COST-BENEFIT ISSUE

Winsor A. Lott

New York State Education Department

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Winsor A. Lott

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Paper presented at the meeting of
the National Consortium on Testing,
Arlington, Virginia, May 1979

TM009 563

New York's "Truth-in-Testing" Bill:

A Cost-Benefit Issue

The New York State Education Department is often viewed as the nation's leading publisher of "open" tests, which is the label currently attached to tests that become available to the examinees and the general public after the tests have been administered. Open testing has characterized our oldest testing program, the Regents examination program, since its origin in 1865, and open testing will be the pattern in our newest program of Regents Competency tests. During the current school year, the New York State Education Department will publish 36 Regents examinations, 16 other high school achievement tests, and 10 competency tests -- a total of 62 examinations -- that are completely open and available to anyone who wants them. In addition, 8 other tests will be administered, as a part of our pupil evaluation and competency testing programs, that are "semi-open" in the sense that they are available for inspection in thousands of school buildings throughout the state. All of these tests are published for use in New York State schools, as a means of maintaining academic standards and providing grist for the mill of accountability.

Nevertheless, we find it necessary to oppose the enactment of a bill that has been introduced in both the New York State Senate (S-5200) and Assembly (A-7668), which is described by its proponents as a "truth-in-testing" bill. The bill is concerned solely with the tests that are used for post-secondary or professional school admissions, such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the American College Testing Program assessment, the Graduate Record Examination, the Miller Analogies Test, the Medical College Admission Test, and the Law School Admission Test.

The bill has four major provisions. Section 341 would require that all background reports and statistical data on the affected tests become public records. Section 342 would require the tests themselves become public records and that any examinee be provided, upon request, with a copy of the test, the scoring key, and his or her answer sheet. Section 343 would require that the examinees and test score recipients be given prior notice of the purpose of the test, the knowledge and skills measured, the score scale, the standard error of measurement, the correlation of scores with other variables, the nature of the score reports, the accuracy of the scores, and the future use of the scores. Section 344 would require that no score be disclosed without the examinee's specific authorization.

Obviously, Section 342 is the heart and soul of this bill and the only section that causes the New York State Education Department to oppose the bill's enactment. To put it as briefly as possible, Section 342 raises a cost-benefit issue. In our judgment, the costs associated with making admissions tests "open" far outweigh any benefits that may be realized.

As I indicated, the New York State Education Department publishes many open tests each year. They are educational achievement tests, and they are open because they serve as a means of communication between the Education Department and the classroom. They tell teachers and students exactly what outcomes of instruction are important, and they accomplish this task much more effectively than any of the other forms of communication that we use, including the publication of syllabuses, course outlines, study guides, bulletins, and newsletters. The educational benefits of having open Regents examinations and competency tests clearly outweigh the cost of producing dozens of new examinations each year.

But we have also had experience with secure tests. For many years we administered a secure examination for the purpose of selecting winners of the more than 18,000 Regents college scholarships that are awarded annually to high school seniors. Currently, the Department's College Proficiency Examination Program uses secure

examinations as a service to individuals who wish to earn college credit for knowledge and skills acquired outside of ivy-covered walls. Our experience with these secure examinations has taught us two things: (1) Secure tests are considerably less expensive to produce than open tests, and (2) secure tests are generally of better quality than open tests. The reasons are obvious. The process of training item writers, reviewing items, pretesting items, conducting item analyses, and selecting usable items is a costly and time-consuming process. Moreover, "good" items are hard to find. If items can be reused, which is possible only with secure tests, the publisher can continually increase the proportion of good items in the item bank from which the tests are assembled, virtually assuring that every item used on an examination will be well-written and will contribute to the validity and reliability of the test.

Looking only at the cost implications of Section 342, there can be no question that the publishers of admissions tests would be required to increase their expenditures for test development in order to maintain their current testing schedules. Assuming that about 20% of the items used on each secure test are new items, the cost of developing open tests would be five times greater than the cost of developing secure tests. Assuming again that secure test development represents 25% of a publisher's total expenditures, the total

expenditures would double with open testing. Using a different set of assumptions, one may forecast a smaller or larger impact on the publishers of admissions tests, but it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the impact will be significant.

Faced with increased costs, publishers will be required to increase the fees paid by examinees. Under the assumptions stated above, the fees could be doubled. It must be borne in mind, however, that the bill under discussion would become law only in New York State. It would not be necessary for publishers to make all of their tests open and to increase fees for examinations administered in other states. It could be argued, in fact, that those who derive the benefits of open testing should incur the cost. Thus, New Yorkers face the prospect of paying higher examination fees than examinees in other states.

Unfortunately, there is another step that publishers could take to minimize the impact of the proposed legislation. They could simply reduce the number of tests administered in New York State. For example, instead of offering the Scholastic Aptitude Test on seven Saturdays and seven Sundays, its publisher could administer the test in New York only twice a year, once in the spring and once in the fall, while maintaining a full testing schedule in Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ontario, and Quebec. This would send many New Yorkers across the

state line to take or retake tests at times when they are not being administered in New York State.

No one can accurately predict what steps the various publishers of admissions tests will take if the bill under discussion becomes law in New York State. That they will increase fees is certain. That they will reduce the schedule in New York State is very likely. Consequently, the State Education Department is compelled to oppose passage of the bill because of the potentially harmful effect of Section 342 on New York State residents.

Our general concern for New York State residents is heightened by the fact that six of the admissions tests affected by the proposed legislation are used as the basis for awarding scholarships and fellowships in eight different scholarship and fellowship programs administered by the State Education Department. The major argument for using these tests is to avoid the needless duplication of testing which would result from the use of Department-prepared examinations, to the extent that our own tests would parallel the various admissions tests. Thus, the negative impact of the proposed legislation would be most acute for scholarship and fellowship candidates, many of whom have the least ability to pay the increased fees and travel to other states to take the examinations.

The use of admissions tests for scholarship and fellowship purposes introduces an additional concern and potential source of increased fees. As a convenience to candidates, they may submit scores obtained on any testing date prior to the filing deadline for the scholarship or fellowship application. This avoids many administrative problems associated with a single testing date. At the same time, it creates a need for test scores that have identical scale values regardless of the form that is taken.

There are many strategies for equating test scores (Angoff, 1971), but the most accurate results are obtained when items are common to more than one form of a test, which requires that items be reused. If the items used for equating purposes are not operational items, they are protected from release in the bill under discussion, as are questions that appear only for pretesting purposes. However, publishers that use operational items for equating purposes will have to modify their equating procedures.

There is also a potential threat to the inclusion of nonoperational items on a test form solely for use in equating and pretesting. In the Scholastic Aptitude Test, examinees spend one-sixth of their testing time answering questions that have no bearing on their scores, and they have no idea which items these are (Donlon & Angoff, 1971). If this test becomes open, one can

anticipate considerable pressure on its publisher to eliminate the nonoperational items. This will force the publisher to devise new, more-costly, and less-accurate methods for equating test forms and for pretesting questions.

We have referred to the benefits that are claimed for Section 342 of the bill under discussion, and it may be worthwhile to examine them more closely. One benefit is that it would make the tests available for all to inspect and evaluate and administer in independent research. As it now stands, however, some publishers have released forms of their tests for these very purposes. Further, this benefit could be realized by simply requiring all publishers to release one or two forms of their secure tests. It is unlikely that this would force publishers to redesign their entire systems of test development and increase their examination fees.

A second benefit claimed for Section 342 is that it would allow examinees to review their answer papers in order to verify the accuracy of the scoring and challenge any questions that are poorly written or incorrectly keyed. Assuming that this is necessary or desirable, it, too, could be accomplished by less radical surgery. The publishers could be required to designate certain locations in which examinees could review their answer papers, the questions, and the scoring key under

secure conditions. This is the procedure followed with New York State Civil Service Examinations, and it works well without any adverse effects upon the cost and quality of the examinations.

In summary, the New York State Education Department is cpposed to the passage of S-5200/A-7668 because the cost of Section 342 would greatly outweigh the benefits that may be derived. If the benefits are important, there are less costly ways in which they can be realized.

REFERENCES

Angoff, W. H. Scales, norms, and equivalent scores. In R. L. Thorndike (Ed.), Educational measurement (2nd ed.). Washington: American Council on Education, 1971.

Donlon, T. F. & Angoff, W. H. The Scholastic Aptitude Test. In W. H. Angoff (Ed.), The College Board Admissions Testing Program: A technical report on research and development activities relating to the Scholastic Aptitude Test and Achievement Tests. New York: College Entrance Examination Board, 1971.